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Methodism Indefensible,

by a True Churchman,

1820

against Everett

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METHODISM INDEFENSIBLE:

OR,

STRICTURES ON THE FOUR LETTERS

OF

MR. J. EVERETT,

IN

ANSWER TO THE OBSERVATIONS

OF

THE REV. LATHAM WAINSWRIGHT,

Rector of Great Brickhill,

ON THE

DOCTRINE, DISCIPLINE, AND MANNERS,

OF THE

Wesleyan Methodists.

BY A TRUE CHURCHMAN.

Sumite materiam, qui scribitis, æquam
Viribus ; et versate diu, quid ferre recusent,
Quid valeant lumeri.

Hon.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR, BY R. GEORGE,
EAST STREET, MANCHESTER SQUARE.

1820.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN the following pages the Author has studied brevity as far as it was possible, consistently with a clear exposition of the errors which it was his object to refute, and of the gross mis-statements he has undertaken to correct. But notwithstanding his intentional omission of many points contained in the Letters in question, either too frivolous to be deserving of notice, or too absurd to be likely to mislead, he feels persuaded that sufficient, and even more than sufficient, has been said, to shew the futility of the defence recently framed for the Methodists, and to repel the accusations of their ill-chosen champion.

A sect whose chief devotion lies
In odd, perverse antipathies,
In falling out with that or this,
And finding somewhat still amiss ;
More peevish, cross, and splenetick,
Than dog distract, or monkey sick.

HUDIBRAS, CANTO I.

METHODISM INDEFENSIBLE,

&c.



IT is obvious that when the heart is endangered, the care of the less important parts of the system must of necessity be deferred till the seat of vitality has ceased to give rise to serious apprehension; or that when the citadel is attacked, the protection of the rest of the works must yield for a time to the necessity of defending what is absolutely essential to the safety of the whole. Thus it is with religion. When the very existence of Christianity is exposed to the undisguised fury of its enemies; when the evidences on which it is supported are attempted to be destroyed; when the truth of its doctrines is denied, the justness of its moral precepts called in question, and the character of its Divine Author openly calumniated, our attention, and our efforts are imperiously called to the preservation of what constitutes the only real source of all we can enjoy here, or can hope for hereafter. As soon, however, as the machinations of its more formidable foes have been defeated; as soon as its stability has been secured from the combination of violence and sophistry so actively employed for its ruin, we may again direct our notice to the minor causes by which the progress of the Christian religion is impeded, and its beneficial effects materially injured. That one of these causes is to be recognised in the continued increase of sectarism in this kingdom,

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will scarcely be questioned by those who consider union as intimately connected with strength, and who must consequently admit that the effect of numerous divisions of the people into isolated and independent sects is to augment the difficulty of establishing the truth, and to foster a spirit of proselytism and jealousy. A religious Establishment, under the more immediate protection of the civil power, though, like all other human institutions, liable to some objections, appears to be unquestionably better adapted than any other mode to forward the great ends of Christianity, and to obviate the evils of contention among rival parties of nearly equal strength. In this view, the Church of England has been eminently useful to the cause of pure and rational religion; but it is not to be concealed that this utility has been too frequently counteracted by the opposition of numerous separatists, who have falsely imagined that they could improve upon the model placed before them, by additions and alterations, which must be regarded by the unprejudiced as not less injurious to its strength, than destructive of its beauty and design. Among the foremost of these may be classed the Wesleyan Methodists, who, by affecting to form part of the National Church, and by professing to adhere more strictly to her primitive doctrines, have succeeded in persuading a numerous party to embrace tenets of a totally opposite character, and to adopt practices unsupported by any other authority than that of the founder of this sect and his succeeding partisans. In proof of what I have here advanced, I appeal to the contents of a pamphlet published, not many months ago, by Mr. James Everett, (whom I believe to be a preacher of that connexion at Hull) in answer to *Observations on the Doctrine, Discipline, and Manners of the Wesleyan Metho-*

dists, by the Rev. Latham Wainewright, Rector of Great Brickhill.

To point out all the errors, the inconsistencies, and I may add, the absurdities contained in the Remarks of this defender of Methodism, would occupy more time than the task really deserves, and would require more patience, perhaps, in the reader than he can reasonably be supposed to possess. The strictures I have to offer, therefore, will be confined to such passages as appear more particularly to call for a reply, and I have no hesitation in saying that the inference to which they will lead will be no other than this;—that the validity of the arguments employed by Mr. Wainewright remains unshaken, and that the dissonance of the system of Methodism with the Established Church can no longer be dissembled. This curious composition comprises four letters, addressed to Mr. Joseph Benson, who, if I mistake not, may be considered as the High Priest of this sect, or who, at least, is looked up to as their leading man. But whatever degree of attachment Mr. Benson may feel towards his correspondent, the perusal of these epistles will certainly not authorise him to assign the same cause for his partiality, as that by which Cicero describes himself influenced in his friendship for Marcus Fabius: *Mirificeque eum diligo cum propter ingenium ejus summamque doctrinam, tum propter singularem modestiam.**

STRICTURES ON LETTER I.

The first letter is entirely occupied by desultory remarks, from which, however, it is by no

* Epist. ad Famil. Lib. ii. Ep. xiv.

means difficult to infer, not merely the incompetence of the writer to so rash an undertaking, but the true spirit of the whole party, and their dislike to the great body of the Clergy, that is, to those who manfully resist the incursions of enthusiasts and fanatics.

Of the style of reasoning adopted by the letter-writer, one of his earliest remarks will afford no inadequate specimen. Thus (in page 4) he observes "It is with Methodism of the present day, Mr. W. informs us he has to do, and yet he refers to the Minutes of 1744 and 1745.*" But if we enquire why Mr. W. refers to these early dates, we shall find that he does so for this very obvious reason;—that these Minutes are detailed in some of the latest writings of that sect, as forming part of their *present* system. As well might he censure the conduct of a lawyer, who in treating of the present state of English jurisprudence, should appeal to the authority of the Bill of Rights, or of the Statute of Mortmain, or of numerous other acts of still higher antiquity.

Whoever has read Mr. W.'s Introduction to his Observations, will scarcely refuse to concede to him the negative credit of avoiding illiberality of sentiment and intentional harshness of expression, or will, at least, acknowledge that he professes himself to be an enemy to intolerance and bigotry. Yet Mr. E. talks of his "*severe philippic* against modern political reformers." I certainly will not undertake to decide what Mr. E.'s individual opinions may be on the subject of politics, but I verily believe, that those of the majority of that *connexion* do not coincide with

* This alludes to the Minutes kept of their proceedings at the Annual Meeting, or Conference, of the Methodist preachers.

the wild and levelling principles recently revived in this kingdom by some worthless demagogues, under the disguise of reformers. As the hearers, however, of the Methodist preachers naturally imbibe the hostility exhibited by the latter towards the established Clergy, they are too prone to transfer this dislike to all persons of station and authority, who are so often closely connected, and in many cases, identified with the clerical body. They who shew themselves decidedly inimical to the Church, may the more easily be persuaded to indulge a similar disposition towards the State. If Mr. E. be a loyal man (and I pretend not to dispute it) his remark, to say the least, was an unfortunate one.—This is followed by nearly a page of vituperation against the discipline of the Establishment, or more properly speaking, against its Bishops, for admitting into the Sacred Order “men who clothe themselves with wool, and feed themselves with the fat, while they starve the flock,” and it concludes with recommending (in the words of one of the same party) “that all hireling priests and ecclesiastical drones should be expelled from the Lord’s vineyard.” The assertions here advanced against the Prelates of the English hierarchy are too notoriously false to require any serious reply, but they serve to shew the disposition of those by whom they are maintained, and the measures they would openly pursue, did an opportunity present itself, favourable to their views.

The letter-writer next proceeds to censure Mr. W.’s inconsistency, as he considers it, in admitting that the early exertions of the Methodists were attended with a certain degree of benefit to some of the miners and colliers in different parts of the kingdom, while at the same time, he condemns the whole system as injurious to the welfare of the community. It would be very

difficult, I imagine, to any but a Methodist, to discover in what the inconsistency here alleged consists, as it is evident that a liberal Protestant, for example, may very reasonably allow that some advantage has in several cases resulted from the preaching and indefatigable perseverance of the Roman Catholics, and yet may regard the Popish hierarchy as a most pernicious combination of superstition and error.*

It is well known that the Methodists entertain opinions on many essential points of doctrine diametrically opposite to those of the Calvinists, and yet with an ardor, not very comprehensible to a stranger, Mr. J. Everett heroically exclaims: "Thank God, the number of Evangelical Clergymen, much as they are the but of Mr. W.'s displeasure, is on the increase"! Extraordinary as this may appear at first sight, yet to those who are a little better acquainted with the views and dispositions of the Methodistical party, the solution of this paradoxical conduct is not quite so difficult. These benevolent itinerants would unite with any sect, however widely they may be at variance on the most important articles of their faith; they would combine with any description of men, whether within the pale of the Establishment or without, in order to oppose more effectually the influence and authority of the *regular* Clergy, who have so laudably withstood the progress of superstition on the one hand, and of fanaticism on the other. After this bold avowal of their defender, we shall not be

* The letter-writer's attempt to distort two anecdotes respecting Dr. Johnson and the late Bishop of Worcester, into proofs of their approbation of the Methodists, is too preposterous to impose upon the weakest of his readers: and the tone of defiance which he immediately afterwards assumes in speaking of his antagonist, is at once puerile and ludicrous.

surprised at any thing advanced by the followers of Wesley, however replete with inconsistency and folly. We shall not be surprised that they still persist in comparing the rise and progress of their own enthusiastic and pernicious system to the first propagation of the sublime religion of Christ, and that they still pertinaciously aver that the success which has hitherto accompanied their efforts, is an indisputable proof of its divine authority. A similar success might with equal justice be alleged in favour of various other denominations as well among the Heathens as among Christians ;—denominations which like Mr. E.'s sect, flourished for a time and boasted of innumerable converts, but which after the lapse of some years, happily for mankind sunk into merited and eternal oblivion. This I have not the smallest doubt will, sooner or later, be the event with Methodism ; but still it affords no argument against the utility of those writers whose object is to diminish the evil produced by its temporary reception, and to hasten the period of its final downfall.

When he perceives the nature of the man with whom he has to deal, Mr. W. I should apprehend, would feel but little difficulty in pardoning the personalities in which this writer scruples not to indulge, and in overlooking those marks of jealousy and envy which the ecclesiastical preferments and the academical honours of the Clergy in general, and of Mr. W. in particular, but too visibly excite in the mind of his opponent. Under this impression, I deem it unnecessary to advert to the few remaining remarks contained in the close of the first letter. I shall merely observe that Mr. W.'s assertions respecting the neglect of literature and science so notorious among the Methodist teachers, are not at all

invalidated by the existence of Kingswood and Woodhouse Grove schools; for it is not even pretended that they are designed for the education of their future preachers, nor does it appear that the latter are compelled to submit to any preparatory course of study, or to undergo any examination of their literary and theological acquirements previous to their assumption of an office, which the generality of them are so little qualified to undertake.

STRICTURES ON LETTER II.

The commencement of Mr. Everett's second epistle presents the reader with several curious remarks, from which I have selected the following, on two of the characteristic tenets of his party, as a specimen. "If the influence of the Spirit, and extraordinary occurrences of Providence ceased, as we are informed, with the age of miracles, the accounts which we have of them in Scripture can possess no more interest to us than any other historical fact.—What is it to me what the primitive Christians experienced, if I am not to be made a partaker of like precious faith?—How can I improve from what is no concern of mine?" So that according to this mode, I do not say of reasoning, but of writing, unless we possess precisely the same privileges and the same gifts as those enjoyed by the immediate disciples of our Saviour; unless we possess the same power of predicting future events, and the same divine communications which were granted to the prophets and patriarchs of old, Mr. E. would teach us to ask,—What advantage can we derive from the relation of those facts in the volume of inspiration? How can we improve from what is *no concern of ours*? To those who

are unbiassed by narrow and party views, it is abundantly evident that all extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, all sensible and immediate inspiration terminated with the cessation of the miraculous powers. It is the denial of this plain matter of fact, which has strongly marked many of the enthusiasts of former times, and which still distinguishes those of the present age. They are not content with the silent and imperceptible operations of the Divine Spirit, so freely admitted by our own Church, but they claim the privilege of receiving sensible communications of divine Grace, and a complete renovation of the heart by the perceptible interposition of Almighty power. They are not content with allowing, in conjunction with the orthodox, that the superintending and over-ruling care of Providence is constantly extended to every part of the creation, but they extravagantly call upon us to believe that rewards and punishments are visibly awarded to mankind in the present world, in conformity with their moral deserts, though it is manifest, if we are to give any credit to long experience and to the language of Scripture, that this distribution is reserved for a future state. The same absurdity is also committed by these sectarists in applying rules and practices to themselves, which, in the nature of things, could only refer to the first propagators of our holy faith. But for condemning these instances of weakness and folly, Mr. W. is vehemently censured by his opponent, and is accused of introducing "a new ground of religious controversy." Of this, let the reader decide.

The next accusation brought forward by the letter-writer (p. 32) is, that Mr. W. has introduced into his work, comprising 217 pages, *only fifty-three* quotations from Scripture, of which the greater number are declared by his

opponent, as we might anticipate, to be unsatisfactory. "Never," he exclaims in truly *elegant* and *grammatical* language, "did I meet with a writer who makes a greater noise about Scripture than Mr. W. and quote less." A deficiency of citations from the Sacred Volume is a charge which can certainly never be alleged against the Methodists, for it is one of the distinguishing characteristics of this and several other sects whose converts are confined to the uneducated part of the community, that they profusely apply the language of the inspired writers in support of tenets totally inconsistent with their real signification, and that they endeavour to compensate for their paucity of arguments by the rapid enunciation of ill-assorted and unconnected texts which, though they fail to confute, may oftentimes have the effect of silencing the objections of their less credulous hearers. A very small proportion, let it be observed, of these itinerant orators have the slightest acquaintance with the original Greek of the New Testament, or with the Hebrew of the Old; and indeed, the greater part of them are so destitute of education as to be incapable of conversing on the most ordinary topics without violating the simplest rules of syntax. With what judgment, then, persons of this description can explain and apply the more difficult passages of the Sacred Writings, (and to these they are continually recurring) we can be at no loss to conjecture. To many, perhaps, this habit of indiscriminate quotation may appear to be only ridiculous, but to the poor and the uninformed it must frequently be productive of serious evil. It cannot be questioned that Mr. W. might very easily have increased the number of his texts, but I am far from thinking that he would by this means have increased the force of his reasoning. His principal object was

not to prove either the truth of the doctrines or the authority of the discipline of his own Church, but to disprove the assertions made in favour of the wild system invented by the Methodists, and forced upon the public as an improvement upon the former. His business, therefore, was chiefly to confine himself to the few texts which can with any plausibility be urged by this party, as countenancing their particular views. To notice one half of the passages which they have tortured into their service, would have been nothing better than a gross misapplication of time, as it was only necessary to shew that those texts upon which they place the greatest reliance, have been perverted from their primitive signification, and are altogether incapable of the construction given to them by these ignorant expounders. To do more than this, would be to follow the example of those numerous fanatics who, notwithstanding Mr. E.'s disclaimer, imagine, or rather lead their auditors to imagine, that the strength of their arguments is augmented in proportion to their accumulation of texts, how little soever relevant to the point in discussion.

I will not follow this writer in his remarks on the abstract nature of virtue and vice, and on the principle by which the mind is urged to cultivate the one and to avoid the other, because it is evident that on metaphysical and ethical subjects, his ideas are so completely bewildered that he is incapable of expressing himself with tolerable perspicuity: and it is only to be lamented that persons will attempt to discuss intricate topics, with which they are wholly unacquainted, and which are seldom properly investigated by those who have not enjoyed the advantages of an academical education. After some very confused and unmeaning observations respecting moral obligation, the result, I presume, of Mr. E.'s

lucubrations on the philosophy of the human mind, he proceeds to vindicate the peculiar doctrines of the Methodists—*conviction of sin, assurance of faith, and sinless perfection.*

It is a singular circumstance that the Methodists, whenever they are charged with holding these doctrines by their opponents of the Established Church, endeavour to explain them away, as if conscious of their unsoundness; and to prove that they are in fact nothing more than what are maintained in our Articles, Liturgy, and Homilies. I will not fatigue the reader by repeating the arguments which have been so often used to shew the futility of these assertions, as I conceive that a reference to their standard work, the Arminian or Methodist Magazine, will abundantly satisfy any reasonable inquirer of the peculiarity of these favourite tenets. Indeed, the abridged cases contained in Mr. Wainwright's *Appendix* would alone furnish a commentary so plain and unequivocal, that any attempt to disguise the nature of these distinctive and absurd dogmas must be regarded as altogether nugatory; and it is remarkable that this *Appendix*, except in one solitary instance, is carefully passed over in silence—more eloquent perhaps than words—by this champion of the Wesleyan scismatics. Mr. E.'s quotations from the Homilies are perfectly useless, and were obviously intended to blind the eyes of his illiterate followers, as no member of the Church can possibly deny their truth. But the main question is neither more nor less than this,—can the process of *Conversion* as explained by this sect, be proved to be identical with any thing advanced by our own Church? If not, that man must be possessed of more than ordinary presumption who pronounces this doctrine, by whatever name it may be called, to form part of the national creed.

Does the Church of England, I would ask, inculcate the necessity of undergoing two distinct operations in the heart so forcible, and so perceptible to the individual, that he can describe all the symptoms and changes with as much accuracy as a physician can relate the diurnal variations in the pulse of his patient? Does our venerable Establishment declare its belief that the Christian must hope for salvation in vain, till he has received a communication from the Holy Ghost, too clear to admit of delusion, that his sins have been forgiven, and that he is freely and effectually justified?—But it is attempted to be shewn by Mr. E. that the *suddenness* of these operations, represented by his opponent as generally requisite, though not always absolutely indispensable, is not considered to be so by the party in question. This is another instance of his endeavouring to disguise a fact which he is aware must be justly liable to the charge of fanaticism. But let any man read with impartiality the publications of the Wesleyan party, and more particularly the Methodist Magazine, and then say whether it be possible to rise from the task (for a task it certainly is) without a strong persuasion that the *instantaneousness* of the sinner's conversion, is considered as a very essential quality. Mr. E. is reluctantly compelled to admit that “there is certainly a predilection in favour of a *hasty reformation*” (p. 47), but at the same time, he would insinuate that this rapidity of change is only occasional. “That persons are *sometimes* suddenly convinced of the odious nature of sin, the Methodists certainly affirm, but it is because they have been witnesses of such facts.” (p. 54.) His explanation that it may be sudden in its commencement, and gradual in its progress is a mere after-thought, and is in truth a wretched quibble to avoid the force of an objection not so

easily overcome. To place the matter beyond all doubt, let us listen to the language of their idol, Wesley himself. "In any particular soul, (he thus explicitly affirms,) it has *generally, if not always*, been wrought *in one moment*."* To this decisive passage, Mr. E. very prudently makes no reply. As a confirmation of the same point, Wesley's own conversion is related by himself to have been sudden, as it took place, we are told, in Aldersgate-street, at about a *quarter before nine o'clock* in the evening!† The declaration contained in the Address of the British to the Irish Conference in 1812, that "Salvation is not of faith, unless every blessing bestowed upon by the Lord is *instantaneous*," affords another evidence, though it is attempted to be qualified by Mr. E. but unfortunately for his purpose, the expressions are too plain and deliberate to admit of misapprehension. To these I could add many corroborative proofs from their other writings, but the almost innumerable cases of *sudden* conversion detailed in the Methodist Magazine alone, render it incontestible that rapidity is regarded as a most material circumstance in this change by the bulk of the Wesleyan sectarists; and I confess that I am somewhat surprised that Mr. E. who in general effects so much intrepidity, should in the present instance betray symptoms of shame too obvious to be dissembled.

On the necessity of a *sensible assurance* of God's pardon, the letter-writer expatiates with much prolixity and misapplied zeal, and he appears to be astonished that it should be denied by any Clergyman of the Church of England. The Scriptural passages adduced in proof of this

*Coke and Moore's Life of Wesley, p. 198.

† Wesley's Life by Coke and Moore, and Benson's Apology.

doctrine have been so often shewn to be utterly devoid of the meaning forced upon them for this purpose, that it would be as useless as it would be irksome again to tread the same beaten path. There is one curious argument, however, employed on this occasion which I cannot resist noticing ;—that this *perceptible assurance* is absolutely necessary for the *comfort* of every true believer. It is very probable, observes this champion of itinerancy, that were this not the case, a Christian might continue to pray for his justification, when he has in fact been justified. But if we allow this mode of reasoning to be legitimate, we should reject the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day, our daily bread," because, at the time of uttering this prayer, the subsistence of the day has already been provided. But to apply the remark to other cases ; it must surely be admitted that nothing can be more essential to "the comfort and moral safety" of a malefactor, for example, on the point of satisfying by his death the violated laws of his country, than that he should know, with certainty, whether the short repentance he has experienced will secure his admission into the kingdom of heaven. But are we, on that account, authorised to suppose that a certain knowledge of the fact, a full assurance of his acceptance is actually communicated to his soul before he is summoned to execution ? I know that it is the favourite occupation of many among the Methodist and the Evangelical parties to endeavour to effect this *sudden conversion* in the hearts of the condemned criminals, who unfortunately crowd our gaols ; but admitting, as I do, the disinterestedness of their motives, I really conceive that nothing can be more erroneous than this conduct as it respects the objects themselves, and that nothing can tend more effectually to

produce wrong impressions on the minds of the spectators, than to exhibit men who may have been guilty of the most flagrant crimes, and whose whole lives may have been one continued act of fearless transgression, not like the contrite and trembling beings whose judicial condemnation had brought them to a proper sense of their awful situation, but marching to the gallows with all the triumphant ejaculations of an immaculate saint, and with the fullest confidence of exchanging the present scene of their atrocities for the realms of infinite purity and bliss. Such are the blessed effects of Methodistical and Evangelical *conversion*; and such the lessons held out to the gazing multitude!

But the truth is, that this special *assurance*, upon which the Wesleyans confer so much false importance, is as needless as it is unauthorised. In the present life, absolute certainty is seldom attainable, and even in abstract science we may search for it in vain, except in the case of pure mathematics. Man must be guided in the greater part of his conduct by probability in its various degrees, from its lowest evanescent state up to moral certainty. And thus it is also with the knowledge he can obtain respecting his final destiny. If he has complied with the conditions prescribed in the Christian revelation, he is taught to look forward, not indeed with the bold presumption of the fanatical Methodist, but with the humble confidence of a disciple of Christ, to that blessed reward which is promised to those who persevere "in working out their own salvation." If, on the other hand, he has wilfully and habitually violated the injunctions of the Gospel, it is not the poignant sorrow of a few transient moments, nor the subsequent extatic joy with which these teachers may have inspired his bosom during the last hours of his existence,

that can entitle him to "the inheritance of the saints in light." Contrition and repentance, indeed, are wisely inculcated by the Ministers of the Establishment even upon the most hardened culprit; but to expect that a specific answer will be expressly communicated to his mind for the purpose of removing every doubt that his penitence is accepted and his pardon granted, could never enter the thoughts of any but the wildest enthusiasts. The issue must in all cases be left with the mercy of God, through the merits of the Saviour.

I pass over the quibbling and evasive answer with which the letter-writer endeavours to refute the sound reasoning of Dr. Maut, (a divine recently, and I may add, most deservedly elevated to the prelacy) on the sudden effects produced by the miracles of the apostles; because I am persuaded that it must be incapable of influencing the minds of any who properly exert their discursive faculties.

I would observe, however, that if these doctrines of conviction of sin, and sensible justification constitute part of the creed of the Church of England, the external proofs of their operation on the mind, as described by the partisans of this sect, as well as the manner in which they are said to affect numerous individuals, may with equal justice claim the same privilege. The tears and sighs, the convulsive groans and piercing yells, the various grimaces of the countenance, and the contortions of the body which are so frequently exhibited by the miserable objects who undergo the process of the Wesleyan conversion, must all therefore be considered as sanctioned and encouraged by the same admirable and rational Establishment. Seriously to deny the truth of a supposition so monstrous, would be little better than trifling with the reader; and I shall only

remark, that every member of the Church (with the exception of the Evangelical party) thinks himself justified in considering the individual whose feelings are thus cruelly worked upon, as equally deserving of commiseration with the unfortunate beings who inhabit our public asylums for mental derangement.

Mr. Everett's brief observations on the necessity of unsinching perfection to all who claim the title of Christian, are too confused and indeterminate to require any thing beyond a passing notice. He might have saved himself the trouble of shewing that the Methodists maintain the possibility of committing sin, even after what they term *entire sanctification*, because Mr. Wainwright nowhere denies it; but still the doctrine itself, taken in the extent to which they carry it, is replete with absurdity. To render this immediately evident, we need only recur to the illustration I have already made use of in the supposed case of a notorious delinquent who has been condemned to death by the laws of his country. Should the wretched man fall into the hands of the Methodist preachers, and should their efforts be successful in producing his conversion, he must not only feel, in the first instance, the tortures of what they denominate a conviction of sin; he must not only shortly afterwards experience a solemn and distinct assurance from the Holy Spirit that he is fully justified, and that all his sins are freely pardoned; but such is the magic power of these self-elected teachers, that he is transformed from a culprit of the most abandoned character into a being of sinless perfection, from one of the vilest perhaps among the followers of Belial into a saint possessed of the spotless purity of an angel of light. And all these operations, all this transformation are supposed to take place within the space of a few

days, or, it may be, of a few hours ! It is almost superfluous to say, except to those whose credulity has led them to become the dupes of this party, that neither the New Testament, nor the Church of England give the slightest countenance to doctrines so completely heterodox and extravagant as a *distinct assurance* of pardon to those who are justified, and a *perceptible communication* of the Divine Spirit with the human soul in the present state of the world.

STRICTURES ON LETTER III.

Having dismissed what he considers to be the most important points in dispute, this staunch disciple of Wesley next proceeds to vindicate the tenets of the Methodists and Calvinists on the subject of a Divine Providence. Here too, his remarks are so vague, declamatory, and irrelevant, that it is difficult to deduce from them any other inference than this,—that the Wesleyans are determined to adhere with inflexibility to their belief in the extraordinary interference of the Almighty in the private concerns of individuals, and that he has ordained the common accidents of life to be judgments for the commission of particular offences. After quoting the well-known passage from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. x. 6—11) which alludes to the punishments inflicted upon the Israelites in the wilderness for disobeying the law of Moses, Mr. E. asks, “ To what end are these extraordinary providences of judgment and mercy, as the consequence of obedience and disobedience left upon record, if not for our advantage ?” Most unquestionably these and all the other facts recorded in Sacred History are mentioned with the

express design of affording "lessons of instruction" to Christians in every age. But does this citation from St. Paul furnish any proof, as Mr. E. would persuade us to infer, that the same judgments would follow actions of the same nature in the present state of the world? We allow without hesitation, that the various instances of this special interposition of Providence detailed both in the Old and New Testaments evince in the most forcible manner the necessity of conforming to the divine laws, and the criminality attached to wilful disobedience. But does this authorise us to affirm that the Almighty continues to pursue the same mode in the execution of his will, which he is known to have adopted in the case of the Jewish nation? Where is the man so obstinately blind (except indeed among the credulous disciples of Wesley and Whitfield) as not to perceive that the supposition is notoriously contradicted by almost every page of modern history, and by the events and transactions of common life? Where is the man (except among the deluded followers of these two heresiarchs) so obtuse in his intellects, so devoid of common discernment, as not to have observed that the exertion of an extraordinary Providence was confined to those nations and to those periods which form the subject of Scripture history? The writer of these letters, however, challenges Mr. Wainewright to point out the texts in which this visible interposition of the Deity is declared to be thus limited; and if he fails in producing them, he is required to state upon what authority he ventures to make the affirmation. Mr. W. might justly reply by asking his antagonist,—Where are the passages in the New Testament to be found which limit the period for the exercise of the miraculous powers conferred on the first promulgators of christianity? And

if these passages cannot be adduced, he may demand to know upon what ground it is maintained, that these gifts have altogether terminated. The obvious answer in both cases is at once simple and decisive;—that our knowledge of the fact is acquired by our own observation, and from the experience of others. Yet, with the most glaring inconsistency, the same sectarists who affect to be astonished that we should withhold our assent to what they relate of their own experience of divine pardon, which we must recollect is entirely confined to what passes within the recesses of the heart, persist in disbelieving a fact obvious to the external senses of all whose faculties are not perverted by enthusiasm, and who have no pre-assumed opinions which they are determined to support at all events.

Mr. E. informs us (p. 85) that though he is no Calvinist, as it respects human Redemption, yet he confesses himself “rather Calvinistic in Providence;” that is, that though he is an *Arminian* where Wesley’s papal authority requires him to be so, yet in other points he can become a *Calvinist* whenever it suits his purpose; whenever, for example, he can by that means aim a more deliberate blow at the Established Church, and make a stronger resistance to the efforts of the Established Clergy. If the Calvinistic part of the clerical body are flattered by the alliance which is thus claimed by the Methodists, we can feel no possible objection to their receiving the benefit expected to result from so heterogeneous a union. We can only say that the genuine members of the Church, who fortunately constitute the great majority, disclaim the notions of both of these parties on this momentous topic, and agree in thinking with the ablest and the most learned of her Divines that an extraordi-

nary Providence was not extended beyond the age of miracles.

There are three points relating to the question before us on which this writer charges Mr. W. with error. "First," says Mr. E. "he establishes a *necessary* connection between an extraordinary Providence, and the *introduction* of religion, as though it were not equally necessary during its establishment." Now I certainly do contend (with Mr. W.) that if ever there can exist a necessity for the special agency of heaven, if ever we can imagine a cause more worthy than another of such an interposition, it must be the promulgation of a system of religion conveying truths of the very last importance to the happiness of man, but the divine origin of which it is impossible to prove by human efforts. Thus, without such supernatural aid, no talents however exalted, no perseverance however unremitted, could have convinced the world that the religion of Christ was really a revelation of the divine will, nor could ever have commanded the means of its final success. As soon, however, as this religion was sufficiently established in a civilized portion of the globe, it no longer required this extraordinary assistance, and might safely be left to extend its progress by the operation of human causes. But, exclaims this sagacious itinerant, "Christianity has yet to be *introduced* among the heathen to whom it is perfectly novel." And it is also, I would add, to be introduced to ages yet unborn. But does it therefore follow that a continuance of the same supernatural agency is requisite for securing either the extension or the permanence of that faith?—Most unquestionably not. The powerful evidences publicly exhibited in attestation of its truth when Christianity was first promulgated

to the world, require no repetition in subsequent times ; but handed down to us, as they have been, by incontrovertible testimony, and strengthened by an accession of corroborating circumstances, they are in every view sufficient to produce conviction upon any reasonable being, though previously a stranger to the very name of the Gospel. The testimony, in short, now in our possession, is completely adequate, when properly explained and impartially received, with no other foreign aid than the ordinary superintending care of Providence, to establish the sublime truths of our holy religion in the remotest corners of the globe, and to convey them to all the succeeding generations of future times. The power of working miracles, indeed, is admitted by Mr. E. to be unnecessary for this purpose, but he yet pleads for the exertion of an extraordinary Providence as requisite to render religion efficacious on the heart ! Till he can adduce irrefragable proofs of this position, we are clearly entitled to dispute its validity.

There is another circumstance at which Mr. E. expresses great surprise,—that Mr. W. should admit the perpetual and visible manifestation of God's interposing power during the *continuance* of the Jewish polity, though he would limit its exertion to the *commencement* only of Christianity. We might almost imagine that this author had never yet discovered that the case of the Jews forms a complete exception in the general history of the world. They may be said to have been a people *sui generis*. Their origin, the nature of their government, their code of civil and criminal laws, their ecclesiastical institutions, and the complex ritual to which they were required to conform, are peculiarities which all unite in proving this nation to have been marked out by the Supreme Being to be the instrument of some

important dispensations for which ordinary means were apparently inadequate. To infer, therefore, from what took place in the case of a people so perfectly dissimilar to every other, and living under a strict Theocracy, that the Almighty would adopt the same measures with respect to other nations and other periods, is a mode of arguing altogether inconclusive and illogical. The book of Revelation is then introduced to prove the perpetuity of the same visible signs of Divine interposition, though I confess myself unable to discover how it can be regarded as furnishing any argument on the subject. This last of the Sacred Writings, in position at least, whatever doubts may exist respecting its date, consists of a series of prophecies symbolically expressed, and like many of the other predictions in the Bible, incapable of full explanation till after their accomplishment. The greater number of them have been already fulfilled, and the remainder will, we have no reason to doubt, receive their completion by the operation of the same *secondary laws*, which though silent, are not on that account the less effective.

The second and third objections to Mr. W.'s observations on this part of the subject, need not detain us long. It is alleged that he improperly *associates* an extraordinary Providence with *miracles*, and that he limits its exertion to *religion alone*. I have no hesitation in saying that most, if not all, the instances on record in which the great Author of Nature has visibly displayed his interposition in the concerns of men, are strictly speaking, included under the class of miracles, and that the occasions on which these displays have taken place were connected either with religion itself, or with persons more or less concerned in its preservation and progress. The whole Jewish history is one continued illustration of these two

positions. As to the example of the Sabbatical year adduced by Mr. E. as a proof of the extraordinary interposition of God in cases unconnected with religion, nothing can be more erroneous than his assertion, that this institution was ordained, not for the promotion of religious purposes, but for the interests of a party,—“a party of Jews comprising a very small portion of the human species.” The Jews, as every catechumen must know, were designed to be a people under the peculiar and more immediate government of the Supreme Being, and to be preserved perfectly distinct from every other nation, not from any motives of unjust partiality, and much less from any merit of their own, but to prevent by their instrumentality the great doctrine of the *Divine Unity* from becoming extinct in the world, and to be the means of introducing with more effect, at the appointed period, the promised *Saviour* of the whole human race. Every institution, therefore, and amongst others that of the Sabbatical year, which tended to maintain this national separation, to diminish the singular proneness of this people to imitate the idolatrous practices of their heathen neighbours, and to preserve in their minds a constant impression of their being a privileged nation, under the peculiar care of Divine Providence, may be correctly said to have promoted “the advancement of the only true religion,” and thus to vindicate the observation of Mr. Wainewright from the aspersions of his opponent. That the government of the Jews was, strictly speaking, a pure *Theocracy*, even under their Judges and their Kings, and that a theocratical polity necessarily pre-supposes an extraordinary Providence, are points most ably proved by Bishop Warburton in his *Divine Legation of Moses*.*

* Warburton's Div. Leg. Book V. Sect. 2.

Erroneous speculative opinions, it has been said, frequently give rise to a corresponding practice, and this truth cannot, perhaps, be more strikingly exemplified than in the habit which prevails among the Methodists, of proclaiming the accidents of life to be neither more nor less than the *judgments* of Heaven upon the sufferer for the sins he may have committed. An instance of greater presumption, folly, and uncharitableness it is not easy to imagine, than that which is afforded by this execrable practice of aggravating the distresses of their fellow-creatures, by holding up the latter to universal notice as the objects of the wrath of God, and as consequently deserving of the hatred of man. Such unjustifiable conduct must doubtless be regarded as the natural result of the unfounded tenets they have embraced respecting an extraordinary Providence, but in the estimation of every charitable member of our own Church, and of all who possess liberal views of the Divine agency, it can merit nothing less than unqualified reprobation. The examples recorded in the Sacred Volume of *Judgments*, in the strict sense of the word, afford "admirable lessons of instruction," as Mr. W. observes, to succeeding generations; but they furnish no proof whatever that the same system of distributive justice was intended to be continued in after ages of the world, while daily observation is sufficient to produce conviction in the mind of any person not frenzied by fanaticism, that no judicial distinction is now *visibly* made between those whose moral characters differ from each other in the widest possible degree. Mr. E. indeed, seems to be in some measure, aware of the consequences to which his doctrine in its unaltered state would often conduct him, and of the difficulties in which he might become involved were it universally applied to the present circumstances of mankind.

And these considerations have induced him to devise a solution which he evidently conceives will meet every objection. He informs us that we cannot come to a complete decision whether any misfortune or accident is to be regarded as a judicial punishment, till we have ascertained the moral character of the sufferer. If the latter be found, upon inquiry, to be a man of bad principles and iniquitous conduct, the disastrous event must then be pronounced to be a judgment; on the other hand, if he belong to the number of the righteous, that is, I conclude Mr. E. means, if he be a true Methodist, the event must be regarded as a mercy. Let us suppose the case then, certainly not an improbable one, of two persons of precisely opposite character passing under the ruins of some ancient edifice; the walls, which had long perhaps been in a tottering state, suddenly fall, and occasion the death of the unfortunate passengers. Did this event happen according to the usual course of nature, and in conformity with the laws of gravitation, or was it expressly ordained to be an instance of *divine judgment*? The Methodists would gladly proclaim it to be an awful visitation of heaven upon the workers of iniquity. But hearing of the excellent character of one of these unfortunate men, or, which in the estimation of a Wesleyan would amount to the same thing, finding that he had been a constant frequenter of the Foundry, or some other noted chapel of the clan, Mr. Everett feels himself called upon to interpose, and to decide with equal modesty, discernment, and liberality, that the fatal accident in which both individuals shared the same fate was to one a curse, and to the other a blessing; to one a mark of the divine vengeance, and to the other, a not less obvious display of heavenly mercy! The bare statement of so absurd a doc-

trine renders any other refutation entirely superfluous; and yet this theological adventurer would persuade the credulous reader that it is countenanced by the authority of Archbishop Tillotson, a prelate whom every friend to religion must admire, and every rational churchman must profoundly venerate. He attempts, indeed, to support his assertion by a passage quoted from a sermon of the archbishop, preached before his great patron William III. in which he alludes to that monarch's narrow escape of death at the battle of the Boyne. The only part of the extract immediately to the point is this:—"and indeed death came then as near to him as possible without killing him; but the merciful Providence of God was pleased to step in for his preservation, almost by miracle." The learned prelate unquestionably introduces this fact as a signal proof of God's providential care, demanding the devout gratitude of the Sovereign and of the nation; but he is very far from intimating his assent to the doctrine which has since been so warmly embraced by persons of enthusiastic feelings. With respect to the phrase "*almost by miracle*," so eagerly taken up by the letter-writer, it is obviously nothing more than a common rhetorical expression made use of to add force to the meaning of the preacher, as, indeed, is sufficiently apparent from the insertion of the qualifying adverb. To represent this excellent and eminent divine as sanctioning by his writings the extravagances of the Wesleyans, is an instance of effrontery which may possibly succeed in duping many of Mr. E.'s ignorant hearers, but among persons of information and good sense, it can serve only to expose his own folly and perverseness.

It appears, however, after all, that Mr. Wainwright does not assert, (whatever may be his individual sentiments,) that the interposing

agency of the Deity is never exerted, even now, in cases where the interests of religion and the happiness of a nation are at stake, but that it is never so *visibly* displayed as to authorise us to speak with confidence and dogmatism in any particular case. He was well aware that the sentiments of theologians and philosophers are divided on this point; and all that he affirms is, that the opinion contended for by the Methodists and Calvinists of the special interference of the Almighty in the affairs of private individuals, and of his distribution of rewards and punishments, in the present day, according to the meritorious or culpable conduct of his moral creatures, is entirely destitute of proof either from Scripture or experience. Whether Mr. W. holds in the distinction (controverted by some modern metaphysicians) between physical and efficient causes, and whether he believes in the immediate, or the delegated agency of the Deity, are questions not at all material in the present case, as it is perfectly clear that he admits, in its full force, the Scriptural doctrine of a particular Providence extending its parental solicitude* to all the various objects of creative love. The selfish creed of the Methodists, on the contrary, leads them to arrogate to themselves and their infatuated converts, the exclusive favour of the great Father of Mercies. "There are many minds, perhaps the greater number (says an acute author, lately deceased) in which the constant habit of ascribing every little beneficial event to some *interposition* of the Divine Power in their *particular favour*, tends to cherish

* He would evidently adopt the language of the poet :

Tal per noi Provvidenza alta infinita
 Veglia. e questi conforta, e quei provvede,
 E tutti ascolta, e porge a tutti aita.

Filicaja, Sonetti.

a sort of *isolating selfishness*, which in its own peculiar relation to events that are supposed to be out of the common course of things, almost loses the comprehensive, and far more important relation of nature to the whole human race.”* How far this observation is applicable to the party in question, it will not require much penetration to discover.

Were I to notice one half of the instances of false reasoning and false statement to be found in Mr. E.’s four vindictory letters, I should swell these few pages into a ponderous volume. I will therefore conclude this part of the subject with specifying one or two particulars not unworthy of the reader’s attention. It is scarcely possible to have a better test of a man’s clearness of intellect than that which is afforded by his writings; nor would it be easy to discover a more apt exemplification of this remark than Mr. E. furnishes in page 111 of his defence of Methodism. His opponent observes, and I believe the majority of reasonable Christians would agree with him, that no event can operate as a *judgment* in the estimation of unprejudiced witnesses, unless they possess the means of ascertaining that the event was *really designed* by the Supreme Being to be a judicial punishment upon those who suffer from its effects. And he then asks, as every sensible man ought to ask,—what *proof* have we that any misfortune is thus intended to be an act of divine punishment upon any offender, when numerous other persons of more flagrant character escape every temporal disaster, and terminate their days in the usual course of nature? Nothing I should imagine can be less liable to misconception than the meaning

* Brown’s Inquiry into the relation of Cause and Effect, p. 538.

of the passage in question, and yet this unfortunate self-instructed and self-appointed teacher contrives to mis-apprehend the purport of the whole. He first reminds Mr. W. of the trials which took place at the assizes for Derby three years ago, on which occasion though some of the criminals who had been capitally convicted of traiterous conspiracies, underwent the sentence of the law, yet others received a free pardon; and he then demands in a tone of self-sufficiency characteristic of the party, how it is possible to mistake the design of this difference of treatment. This curious illustration he considers to be a satisfactory reply to the difficulty suggested by Mr. W. on the subject before us. But I would beg leave to ask any man whose powers of discrimination have not been completely annihilated by fanaticism, what points of resemblance he can discover between the condition of the culprits here alluded to, and the condition of those who suffer the heavy and irremediable misfortunes of human life; what similarity he can trace between the punishment awarded by the law of the land to men whose crimes have been fully proved after a minute investigation before an impartial tribunal, and the *judgments*, or the events so denominated by the Methodists, which involve the innocent and the guilty in the same fate. The punishments ordained by the criminal code, let it be remembered, are inflicted upon the *guilty only*, upon those concerning whose atrocity there cannot exist a doubt; and if the pardon of the Sovereign is extended to some of the criminals, it is because the ends of justice are considered to have been fully answered, and the recurrence of the same offences is believed to be more effectually prevented by this act of clemency, than by a rigorous execution of the judicial sentence

upon the whole number. But do the same circumstances exist in the case of those events which are pronounced to be the *judgments* of Almighty God? Is it not notorious that the sufferings which attend many of the accidents and disasters so common in the world, are not limited to the impious, or to those who belong to the class of "extortioners, unjust, or adulterers"? Is it not too obvious to require any attempt at demonstration that the man of integrity and virtue, the man whose whole life has been devoted to the service of religion and the cause of humanity, is frequently involved in ruin and misery, while his very neighbour who lives in open contempt of all that is just and sacred, escapes without sustaining the slightest injury? Where, then, is the analogy between the two cases? Nowhere, I may safely affirm, but in the brain of this sapient disciple of Wesley. And where are we to learn how to distinguish between the events which are to be considered as judgments, and those which are to be viewed as only occurrences according to the common course of nature? Not in the Old Testament; nor certainly in the New, but solely in the bold assertions and the varnished narratives of Mr. J. Everett and his Evangelical confederates.

There remains but one point, in addition to the foregoing animadversions, to which I deem it at all necessary to call the reader's attention, and the bare mention of which will, if I mistake not, be quite sufficient to enable him to form a judgment of its merits. Among the strange and anomalous notions entertained by the Methodists respecting the moral government of the world by the Supreme Being, we may class as not one of the least so, what Mr. E. denominates a *retaliating* Providence. He employs more than two pages in attempting to shew that the infinitely

benevolent Creator of the Universe delights in displaying that *vindictive* spirit in the treatment of his creatures which he expressly prohibits them from indulging in their intercourse with each other. The *lex talionis*, though adopted for wise reasons in the Jewish code, is explicitly excluded from the Christian. In what part of the Gospel of Christ can we discover the remotest encouragement to revenge, even for the worst of injuries? In what part of the conduct of our blessed Lord can we trace the faintest inclination to foster a disposition at once hostile to the interest of the individual, and subversive of the order and harmony of society? And yet this is the disposition, this is the hateful passion which the Methodists would lead us to believe is indulged by that all perfect Intelligence "in whom there is no variableness nor shadow of changing." The letter-writer then enumerates several instances in proof of this amiable doctrine of a retaliating Providence; and after citing the cases of Pharaoh, Agag, Edom, and Adoni-bezek, he instances more fully that of John the Baptist, beheaded (as Mr. E. reminds us) in compliance with the request made by Herod's daughter at the instigation of her mother. "Mark the sequel," exclaims this true son of Wesley, "and you will see Providence *interesting itself* in the most remarkable manner, in *the revenge* of this murder on all concerned"! To substantiate this affirmation, the writer first mentions the defeat of Herod's army in the war occasioned by his marriage with Herodias; then the expulsion of Herod and Herodias from their kingdom, and their death while in banishment at Lyons; and lastly he sums up his proof with the following *most convincing* fact: "And Salome, the young person who requested the Baptist's head, fell into the ice as she was walking over it, which sud-

denly closing, *cut off her own.*" With this specimen of Mr. E.'s powers of reasoning in his possession, the faculties of that man must be obtuse indeed, who cannot infer from the arguments of the advocate, the strength and merits of the cause he defends.

In concluding these reflections, I would earnestly recommend to the deliberate consideration of Mr. E. and those of his brethren, who are not wholly ignorant of the elements of reading, in the first place, the admirable rule of philosophizing laid down in the Principia of Sir Isaac Newton,—that no more causes should be admitted than are absolutely necessary to explain the phenomena of nature: and in the second place, the two decisive facts cited by Mr. W. from the New Testament at the close of his first Section*. From properly attending to the purport of the former, (the Newtonian precept,) no one but a bewildered enthusiast can fail to perceive the weakness of ascribing every extraordinary event to the immediate interposition of the Supreme Being; and

* The only notice which Mr. Everett takes of one of these passages (for respecting the other he is totally silent) is to remark that "one of the designs God proposed in permitting the cruelty of Pilate to the Galileans, and the fall of the tower of Siloam on 18 of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, was to give others an idea of the punishment which awaited themselves in case they persisted in sin," that is to say, the Almighty in his infinite benevolence chose to inflict a dreadful calamity upon the *innocent*, (at least, equally so with others,) for the purpose of impressing upon the minds of the *guilty* an idea of what, at some future period, they might expect themselves!!

Mr. E. quotes one of Dr. Johnson's prayers as some authority on the subject of Providence, but it is well known that with all his strength of intellect and all his shining talents, an unfortunate disposition to morbid melancholy frequently led that eminent man to indulge superstitious notions, completely at variance with his usual correctness of thinking, and which we might previously have imagined could exist only in weaker minds.

from the statement of the latter, we are taught by the authoritative language of our Saviour himself to condemn the presumptuous practice of declaring the accidental misfortunes to which as creatures of frailty we are all of us subject, to be the *judgments* of an incensed and an avenging Deity.

STRICTURES ON LETTER IV.

So proverbial has become the asperity of controversialists, that the harshness of language into which they are frequently betrayed, however it may occasion our regret, cannot excite our surprise. Mr. Everett commences his concluding epistle with enumerating some of the epithets made use of by his antagonist in speaking of the followers of Wesley and Whitfield; but I can discover nothing in these designations which indicates an uncandid or an illiberal spirit, nor any thing which is not borne out by incontrovertible facts. There is one charge, however, brought forward against Mr. Wainewright which it is incumbent on those who advocate his cause to investigate and explain. In proving his assertion respecting the incompetence of those among the Methodists who assume the office of public instructors of the people, Mr. W. is accused of unfairness in attempting to corroborate his statement by a *partial* quotation from the Methodist Magazine, and by suppressing what he conceived would defeat his purpose. The true state of the case is, and I would refer it to the judgment of any unbiassed person, that the words of the passage, omitted for the sake of brevity, do not militate against Mr. W.'s assertion, nor do they at all disprove what he has alleged on the subject. He is complaining of the ignorance and the deficiency in literary qualifications so con-

spicuous among the great majority of the Methodist preachers, while he censures the total want of provision for the learned education of those who aim at performing the functions of the ministerial office. A passage presents itself in the Methodist Magazine for January 1817, exactly in point, in which it is explicitly declared, that a classical education is not necessary "to procure admission among the Methodist preachers; that the Methodists have no colleges for the instruction of their young ministers; and that a knowledge of the dead languages is not made an indispensable qualification for the work of the ministry. *We can do* (continues the writer of the article in question) *either with human learning or without it. It neither renders a man more or less eligible.*" This passage is surely abundantly sufficient to authorise the assertions advanced by Mr. E.'s opponent; nor is the case at all altered by the sentences which Mr. W. is accused of purposely omitting. The first omission referred to is the following; "So respectable are the British classics, and so numerous are our Bible commentaries, that it is not absolutely necessary to understand Greek or Latin, in order rightly to divide the word of truth, or preach with acceptance to an English audience." I should much wish to know how this passage can invalidate Mr. W.'s inference from the former part of the paragraph. In the first place, I contend that a knowledge of Greek and Latin (to say nothing of Hebrew) is an essential qualification to enable any person properly to understand the various criticisms on the Sacred Writings; and that such knowledge is more particularly required in those who undertake to defend their own peculiar interpretation of Scripture from the objections of learned and acute adversaries. But in the next place, it is an indisputable mat-

ter of fact, that the vast majority of the local preachers of this sect are destitute of even those *English* acquirements which are described by the author of the foregoing paragraph to be within their reach ; nor is it pretended that they undergo an examination in the several branches of divinity accessible to the mere *English* scholar, previously to their assuming the office of a public teacher. Another omission laid to Mr. W.'s charge yet remains to be noticed : " Let not the casual reader of this paragraph hastily conclude (observes the same writer in the Methodist Magazine) that it is a very easy matter to obtain admission into the Methodist Ministry, or that little honour is reflected upon that man who is able to pass his examination satisfactorily. Probably it will be found upon enquiry that the Methodists are very scrupulous in this matter, and would reject those whom almost every other denomination of Christians would receive."— Neither does this passage any more than the former shew that Mr. W. has rashly asserted a fact which cannot be supported. It contains no contradiction of what was declared in the former part of the paragraph,—that *human learning neither renders a man more or less eligible*: and the examination, here alluded to, is not one on the various subjects of learning and science necessary to qualify the candidates for the sacred office, but chiefly relates to other particulars of more utility, perhaps, to those whose great object is to increase the numerical strength of their party by proselyting the ignorant and the weak. The striking fact, however, already mentioned, that the itinerant preachers (who answer to the regular ministers of other denominations) are chosen from the *local* preachers, is alone quite sufficient to decide the point, without farther discussion. We need only enquire who these local preachers are, and we may save our-

selves the trouble of additional research. There is scarcely a market-town in this division of the kingdom, in which some restless mechanic, some discontented shoe-maker, some ambitious tailor, some carpenter with a higher opinion of himself than others entertain, or some luckless smith whose imagination is more heated than his own forge, does not undertake to convert his neighbours from what he denominates the errors of the Established Church, and to preach, as the only safe means of salvation, the doctrines and practices of his Methodistical patrons. Men who might form useful and respectable members of society, did they confine themselves to the anvil, the saw, the needle, or the last, are seduced partly by a silly love of distinction, and partly by the persuasive exertions of their fanatical leaders, to fancy that they have received a *call* to inveigh against the ecclesiastical institutions of the realm, and to aim at supporting a station for which their utter ignorance and want of education must render them wholly unfit. If such be the persons who invariably supply the Wesleyan connexion with their regular pastors, we cannot feel greatly surprised that learning should be represented as not at all essential to the office of a religious teacher; and as little can we be astonished at the coarse declamation, and the disgusting rant in which these unfortunate dupes so freely indulge for the edification of their hearers. Whenever I reflect on the qualifications of these self-ordained instructors, I am always reminded of the description of Hudibras's squire by the first of our humorous poets :

His knowledge was not far behind
The Knight's, but of another kind,
And he another way came by't,
Some call it *Gifts*, some *New Light*,
A liberal art, that costs no pains
Of study, industry, or brains.

Hudib. Canto I.

With respect to the system of *Itinerancy*, Mr. E. places his vindication of this peculiarity principally upon the practice of the apostles; and he again calls upon his opponent to produce any passage in Scripture intimating that this mode of preaching the Gospel was designed to be only temporary. No such passage, I will venture to affirm, can be discovered, and it would be preposterous to expect it. In this and numerous other instances we must form our judgment according to the nature of the case; and where no express directions have been transmitted to us in the apostolic writings, we must have recourse to the exercise of our reason. During the first promulgation of the Gospel, the itinerant plan was absolutely essential to secure the reception of doctrines till then unheard of; but in countries where this religion is generally received and firmly established, not only is the same mode unnecessary, but as Mr. W. has shewn, it is in many points unquestionably prejudicial. The letter-writer has in vain attempted to answer the objections to its present adoption, and in truth, their validity has been admitted to a certain extent, by some of his own party. But nothing can be so truly inconsistent and capricious as the notions and practice of the followers of Wesley, relative to their imitation of the first preachers of Christianity, and their compliance with its injunctions. They maintain, for example, the expedience, if not the necessity, of the system of itinerancy, while they reject the institution of ordination by imposition of hands, so frequently mentioned in the New Testament. They contend for the distinction of their preachers into *local* and *itinerant*, but they condemn the distinction of the clergy into bishops, priests, and deacons. They pretend to follow the primitive Christians in their *agapæ* or love-feasts, but they

are sufficiently politic not to imitate their community of property. The apostolic injunction to the early converts to confess their sins one to another they apply with the utmost readiness to themselves, but the exhortation to anoint the sick with oil, included in the very same passage, they utterly discard. I mention these circumstances, to shew that these sectarists confess by their practice what they deny in words, that the apostolic customs and precepts are not in every instance to be regarded as precedents for the guidance of our own conduct. And yet with singular, though not unaccountable, inconsistency, Mr. E. considers it as a dangerous innovation that Mr. Wainewright should affirm that many of the practices and precepts contained in the New Testament were applicable solely to the early converts to the Christian faith, and cannot with any propriety be adopted in modern times; and the alleged reason for this censure is the absence of all positive declaration that they were designed to be merely temporary in their effect. This defender of Methodism is continually exclaiming for the production of texts to satisfy his puerile unbelief. When, however, he will undertake to point out those passages in which the practices and precepts disregarded by his own sect are declared to be limited to the age of the apostles, it will be time enough for the members of the Church of England to comply with the requisition of their unreasonable and inconsistent opponents.

As the letter-writer says but little in vindication of the Methodistical institutions of *classes*, *bands*, *love-feasts*, and *watch-nights*, I will not needlessly extend these Strictures by dwelling on the evils which, from their very nature, they must tend to produce. The accusation alleged against Mr. W. of insinuating that improper connections take place during the nocturnal assem-

blies held on the watch-nights, appears to have no other foundation than in the irritable feelings of his adversary, as I can perceive nothing in his observations to authorise the charge. But whatever may be Mr. W.'s own sentiments, I am persuaded that the meetings thus sanctioned by the Wesleyan sect naturally create unfavourable suspicions, nor can the bare denial of an interested partisan be deemed sufficient to remove them. I really think that the *auricular confessions* of the Romish Church are more reasonable, and less liable to abuse than the mutual and indiscriminate avowals incumbent on the individuals composing the Methodist *bands* and *classes*, where persons of both sexes, and of almost all ages and characters meet together for the purpose of scrutinizing their vicious thoughts and criminal deeds. Such, indeed, is the tendency of these institutions, that it is scarcely too much to assert that should their prevalence ever unfortunately become universal, we might ultimately expect the recurrence of many of those daring acts of impiety, and many of those shameless excesses of profligacy, which among the ancients characterised their Bacchanalian orgies, their Eleusinian mysteries, and their Phallic festivals.

A great part of the remainder of Mr Everett's fourth letter, instead of refuting the observations advanced by Mr. W. on the Wesleyan manners and peculiarities, is occupied by libellous reflections on the Clergy and the National Church. The silence which this *liberal minded* writer observes on many of the particulars adduced by Mr. W. on the subjects of dress and amusement, is a pretty sure indication of his inability to vindicate his sectarian brethren from the absurdities alleged against them; and the little which he has ventured to say in their defence shews that he either does not, or that he will not per-

ceive the difference between a laudable conformity with the general custom in matters of indifference, and the folly of carrying this compliance to excess. So clouded are his faculties by fanatical prejudices, that he will not admit the propriety of the maxim, *il faut vivre avec les vivans*, where it does not interfere with the performance of any acknowledged duty. What can be more laughably puritanical than the regulations of the Methodists on the article of dress, requiring their followers, under pain of the severest reprobation, religiously to abstain from the most distant imitation of the fashions of the day? And what can be more preposterously rigid than their notions respecting the common diversions and recreations of society? To appear in a coat made in the usual form of those worn by others, to pass an hour after the fatigues of business at a game of whist or piquet, to enter a ball-room where young persons of both sexes are amusing themselves during the inclemency of a winter's evening, and to visit the theatre for the purpose of witnessing the unrivalled talents of Mrs. Siddons (for example) in the character of Lady Macbeth, of Kemble in that of Hamlet, or of Kean in the part of Richard III. are considered, in the eyes of the Methodist, as crimes for which no punctuality in performing the duties of devotion, no acts of charity to our fellow-creatures, and no forbearance from licentious indulgence can possibly atone.*

* I will not shock Mr. Everett's hyper-scrupulous feelings by calling upon him to read for his amusement Count de Stendhal's whimsical remarks on the *beau idéal de la danse*, but I really wish that he and his party would consider the truth of the Italian maxim: "Alcuno intervallo si dee dare all'animo, sì veramente, che non in tutto si disciolga, ma si rallenti;" and that they could be brought to perceive the good sense con-

Sentiments so wild and unreasonable, scarcely merit any other answer than silence or contempt. I cannot, however, omit noticing the coarseness and familiarity, (though I might with justice adopt a harsher epithet,) of some of the expressions made use of by the writer of the letters before me; expressions more likely to produce disgust than conviction, and which we might expect to find in the pages of those blasphemous and deistical works with which this country has been recently deluged, rather than in the publication of one who professes to be an orthodox believer in the truths of revelation. Inveighing with all the bitterness of a Jesuit against the amusements of card-playing, dancing, and theatrical representations, Mr. E. exclaims; "We are called to fellowship with God. But to play games is something like bringing fire from heathen altars, or more properly from *hell* to warm the heart with the love of God." In the same page (174), we also meet with the following specimen of Wesleyan eloquence and reasoning: "Unless we are to forsake these (that is, the amusements just referred to) the Scriptures are obscure. *If we can trace Jesus Christ to the gaming table, to hunting down animals, or footing it at a dance*, then, and not till then, will those things be expedient, and we be justified in the use of them as his followers!" If this is the

tained in the following passage of the admirable Molière in his reply to the narrow-minded bigots who opposed his *Tartuffe*: "Si l'on veut blâmer toutes les choses qui ne regardent pas directement Dieu, et notre salut, il est certain que la comédie en doit être; et je ne trouve point mauvais qu'il (le théâtre) soit condamné avec le reste: mais, supposé, comme il est vrai, que les exercices de la piété souffrent des intervalles, et que les hommes aient besoin de divertissement, je soutiens qu'on ne leur en peut trouver un qui soit plus innocent que la comédie."

language which the Methodists authorise their preachers to adopt in convincing their auditors, I can only say, that, when Mr. Wainewright describes it as bordering on the profane, he might justly be charged with being much too lenient and forbearing.

It is the boast of this defender of Methodism, that he is able to prove all the opinions and practices of his party by the authority of Revelation ; and it must be confessed that when no relevant passages present themselves, he finds little difficulty in giving a meaning to the sacred text exactly suited to his purpose. In the present case, where he declaims with so much vehemence against the dress and diversions of those around him, he at first appears to be somewhat at a loss for citations sufficiently strong to satisfy the expectations of his readers. His researches, however, are at length successful, and he assures us that he has discovered one which, in his opinion, is perfectly conclusive, and the force of which he conceives it impossible to evade. The passage is taken from St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians* : " And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." In this precept of the apostle is contained (if we are to credit the assertions of this sage expositor) an interdictory decree against conforming to the usual modes of dress in the country where we reside, and against participating in those amusements to which these sectarists have contracted so much unjust antipathy. Now I must take the liberty of affirming that to any person at all conversant with the history of the Christian Church, and with the rules of biblical criticism, it must

* Colossians iii. 17.

be evident that no such signification can be deduced from the verse in question. In the first place, I would premise that if the words be taken in the sense which is here ascribed to them, it would be criminal to learn any species of music but "the nasal twang of the conventicle"; it would be highly sinful to compose such works as those of Cervantes and Le Sage; and it would be an unpardonable offence even to read the Rape of the Lock, the Dispensary of Garth, the Lutrin of Boileau, or the Secchia Rapita of Tassoni. The test of innocence employed by this disciple of Wesley in deciding upon the deeds of others is this:—Can they "be commenced, carried on, and ended in the name of Christ and to the glory of God?" Let us apply this test *literally*, (for that alone will satisfy the Methodists) to the familiar transactions of common life, and let the question, as stated above, be put to the person who polishes Mr. E.'s shoes, to the washerwoman who plaits his frills,—if indeed, that decoration be not forbidden by his sumptuary laws,—to the cook who prepares the savoury repast which is to solace him, at his friends' expence, after his labours in the vineyard, or to those whose duty requires them to perform less attractive offices, and let us ask if an affirmative reply can be given by these individuals with more propriety and more justice than by the man of integrity and virtue who occasionally resorts to the theatre, for the purpose of receiving amusement and instruction from the Othello of Shakespeare, the Athalie of Racine, or any other similar production of dramatic talent. But in the next place, it would be infinitely more creditable to Mr. Everett and his confederates, though, I allow, not very advantageous to their cause, not to undertake to interpret the language of Scripture, till they are well assured that they comprehend

its meaning. Now it is well known to those who have any acquaintance with Ecclesiastical History, that the Colossians, to whom this exhortation of St. Paul is addressed, had adopted many of the heretical opinions of the Essenes, and were amongst other errors addicted to the worship of angels, conceiving that their prayers were conveyed to the throne of Grace by these intermediate agents. The apostle, therefore, with peculiar propriety urges them, in the passage before us, to do nothing either in word or deed inconsistent with the commands of the great founder of the Christian faith, and to offer up their prayers and thanksgivings to their heavenly Father in the name of Christ, and not through the intervention of those angelic beings whom they erroneously regarded as objects of adoration. In its primary signification then, this text was intended to correct an heretical practice of the converts at *Colossæ; but if it be considered, in a secondary sense, as applicable to Christians in general, I have no scruple in saying that the amusements so rancorously condemned by the Methodists are, when not carried to excess, in no respect inconsistent with that holy faith which bears the name of Christ; and that every enjoyment of human life, every pleasurable sensation, free from the contamination of vice, demands our grateful acknowledgments to the benevolent Parent of the Universe. Nor would I omit, in enumerating the various causes for gratitude, what I consider to be by no means one of the least,—an exemption from the influence of the fanatical and destructive opinions maintained by the Methodists, and more particularly from that unjustifiable austerity which would convert the blessings of heaven into curses, and would con-

* See Whitby, Pyle, Newcome, in loc. & also Marsh's *Michaelis* vol. iv. c. 19.

fine within a forbidden circle all the attractive, though innocent, objects of human pursuit, and all the happiness and delight they are designed to impart.*

It is time to bring these remarks to a close, and perhaps, I cannot better compensate the reader for the length to which they have been insensibly extended, than by giving him a brief but characteristic description of a Methodist, as it may be collected from the four letters of Mr. J. Everett of Hull. A Methodist then, is one who affects to believe in the orthodox doctrines of the Church of England more firmly than its present members, though he suffers no opportunity to escape of vilifying its discipline, censuring its mode of worship, and libelling the whole body of the clergy, with the exception of those who have arrogantly assumed the title of evangelical. He believes in the absolute necessity of undergoing the radical change which he denominates *conversion* or *experience*, and which consists of two distinct operations. First, every individual, before he can claim the name of Chris-

* It deserves to be noticed that the solitary text, which Mr. E. immediately afterwards introduces to confirm the last, is equally ill suited to assist him in establishing his point. *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* Παν δε ὁ ἕκ' ἐκ πίστεως ἁμαρτία ἐστίν. Rom. xiv. 23. This unfortunate expounder sagaciously observes, that as these amusements have no relation to *faith*, they are here clearly condemned as criminal,—thus palpably mistaking the signification of the term πίστεως. I verily believe that every *junior soph* in our Universities could have informed this self-taught teacher that the real import of the passage is simply this:—that whoever acts contrary to his persuasion of what is right and just, evidently violates the principles of duty. The context alone is, indeed, sufficient to prove this interpretation to be correct, and particularly the latter clause of the 5th verse in the same chapter (Rom. xiv.) Ἐκαστος ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοῷ πληροφροεῖσθω, *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*

tian, must submit to the painful mental process of *conviction of sin*, that is, he must prove that he is convinced of his innate guilt by exhibiting symptoms of the acutest misery and distress. Tears, groans, shrieks, prostrations on the ground, agonizing convulsions, and loud and reiterated vociferations for mercy, are found recorded in the Methodist Magazine, as unequivocal signs of a true conviction. This state continues for a shorter or a longer period according to the supposed malignity of the guilt, and we may add, according to the physical strength of the suffering individual. The scene then becomes reversed, and the grief and anguish of the patient are instantaneously exchanged for extatic joy; Christ is revealed in his heart, and he perceives the presence of the Holy Spirit, assuring him that beyond the possibility of doubt his sins are pardoned, and that he is now become a child of God fully justified by faith. This operation is termed *Assurance of Faith*; and Mr. E. informs us that without this assurance, the hope of salvation is utterly fruitless. The Methodist farther believes that before his death, he must have attained a state of *unsinning perfection*, and that unless he then possesses the purity of a saint, even his favourite doctrine of *assurance* will be of no avail. On this point, however, there is much variance of opinion, and their sage founder himself frequently vacillates, and leaves his followers in obscurity and doubt. Relative to the doctrine of a *Divine Providence*, the disciple of Wesley believes that the Almighty distributes rewards and punishments to mankind in the present world, in strict conformity with their merits and demerits, though the fact is contradicted by the experience of every day; and that the accidents and misfortunes of life are nothing less than *judgments* inflicted upon the sufferer

for his crimes, unless he should be a man of acknowledged worth, or in plainer terms, a Methodist, and in that case, these disastrous events change their character, and are denominated mercies!

Having viewed the principal points in the Methodist's creed, let us now observe whether his church government, discipline and mode of worship are better entitled to our admiration. In the first place, in all these particulars, he condemns the example of the National Church, and not only rejects the offices of bishops, priests, and deacons, but denies the necessity of the sacerdotal order. He affirms that the best and the only effective way of propagating genuine religion is by employing itinerant preachers, chosen from among the lower ranks of the people,—persons entirely destitute of liberal education, and whom necessity has compelled to procure subsistence by unremitted manual labour. These enthusiastic and illiterate individuals are first allowed to make trial of their talents as *local* preachers, in their own neighbourhood, and if their efforts should be successful in saving souls, that is to say, in forming Methodists, they receive the privilege of relinquishing the anvil, the saw, or the last, for the dignity of a *travelling* preacher. These persons, however, are subject to the controul of superintendants, and are amenable to the Quarterly Meetings of the district, and also to the authority of the annual Conference, an assembly which assumes in miniature the power and consequence of a Popish Council. In order to increase the strength and zeal of the party in question, its founder invented the institutions first of *classes*, and *bands*, where they freely examine each other's private conduct, and then of *love-feasts* and *watch-nights*, where they relate the details of

their conversion, and preach, pray, and groan till midnight. This, at least, is the exoteric account of these proceedings. What their esoteric practices may be, is left to the conjectures of those who may chuse to speculate on the subject.

Lastly, the Methodist is not less conspicuous for his austere manners, and his rigid notions respecting the dress and amusements of those around him. He believes it to be a sin that men should wear *lapelled coats*, that women should appear in *long-tailed gowns*,* or that their children should be decorated with superfluous buttons and ribands. The indulgence of laughter even for a moment he considers (in compliance with the instructions of Wesley) as belonging to the list of forbidden pleasures. Music, cards, dancing, and dramatic representations are all anathematized by the austerity of the Methodist as leading mankind to inevitable perdition, and the strict injunction given to the conductors of the Wesleyan schools to prohibit a dancing-master† from passing their threshold, would induce us to believe (what I imagine is not far from the truth) that this party regard the diversion of dancing and the commission of felony as possessing nearly the same degree of moral turpitude. Proficiency in the various branches of literature and science is, as we might anticipate, not professedly, indeed, but virtually discouraged by this sect, and is scarcely ever attained by any of its members; and were we to judge from the language usually held by them on the subject of literary acquirements, we might conclude that the Bible and their own publications were the only works deserving the attention of a disciple of Christ. In a word, under the specious mask of piety, they

* Minutes of Conference for 1806. † Id. for 1785.

would willingly exterminate all the innocent recreations of life, all the accomplishments by which it is adorned, and all the harmless expedients for promoting the enjoyments of human intercourse.

Such are the more prominent features in the character of a Methodist, and such the measures pursued by his party for increasing the influence of what they have chosen to dignify with the name of religion. I may safely leave the reader to decide how far this character accords with the sublime doctrines, and the benevolent spirit of Christianity; and how far it would be for the interest of society that a system so repugnant to all that is just and reasonable as that adopted by the followers of Wesley, should ever become universally prevalent.

Mr. Everett concludes his defence of Methodism, with assuring his correspondent that though he has no hope of permanent fame, he does "not altogether despair of *present effect*." I have only to add, that in the latter particular his expectations will be found to have been strikingly realized; for I am perfectly persuaded that, except among some of his own party, his remarks have had the full *effect* of betraying the feebleness of the foundation on which the Methodists so confidently place their reliance; of proving the utter incompetence of the advocate to whom they have entrusted their vindication; and of exposing, in all their native colours, to the censure of the wiser part of the community, the glaring fanaticism of their tenets, the absurdity of their institutions and discipline, the unscriptural austerity of their precepts, and the pernicious tendency of their manners and practice.

THE END.



